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The Trick to a Great Marriage: Vacation Without Your Partner

Retired women especially are planning more trips away from their significant others

By *Allison Pohle* [Follow](#)

Jan. 21, 2024 9:00 pm ET

More married people are booking travel for one.

Spouses have long split up to travel on girls' getaways or guys' weekends. Now, travel companies, advisers and travelers say solo vacations have become a booming business for all kinds of trips. More people have even booked big bucket-list adventures like African safaris or cruises to Antarctica on their own, according to Wendy Marley, a travel adviser for AAA Northeast.

The trend is especially pronounced among retired couples. In 2023, people 55 and over traveled without their significant other 46% more than people in that age group did the year before, according to the U.S. Consumer Traveler Report from market-research group Phocuswright.

Most married solo travelers are women, travel companies say. These solo—not single—women say they are motivated to see the world, even if their spouse isn't interested in the destination. They also enjoy making new friends and the sense of freedom that comes from independent travel.

"You don't have to schedule anything with another person, and if you want to eat falafel for three meals a day, you can," says Lisa Tsering, a 62-year-old Bay Area writer and editor.

Tsering traveled alone to France for her 60th birthday and is planning a solo trip to Bali this spring. Her husband also likes traveling, but she says that because he works hard, his idea of a vacation is a relaxing getaway.



Lisa Tsering traveled to Mont Blanc for her 60th birthday. PHOTO: LISA TSERING

“That’s just not my flavor,” she says.

Independent travels have strengthened her relationship, she says. Each partner gets to see the person they love fulfilled and happy.

Ticket for one

Road Scholar, a nonprofit educational travel organization for seniors, says the percentage of married people who book its excursions alone has steadily increased since 2007. In 2022, at least 60% of the organization’s solo travelers were married.

Female travelers who responded to a 2023 Road Scholar survey said that in some cases, their spouse wasn’t interested in travel or wasn’t physically able.

Cindy Graunke, a 71-year-old retiree from Richmond, Va., enjoys presidential history and literature, so she has taken Road Scholar trips without her husband of 51 years. He opts for fishing trips instead.

On trips to Ohio and Florida, she requested a roommate, which not only saved her money, but introduced new friends during the trip, she says.



Men traveling solo with the travel company Backroads tend to prefer bike trips. PHOTO: BACKROADS

“Back when I was not retired, all you want to do is veg on vacation. But then after you retire, you want to learn things,” she says.

Tom Hale is founder of Backroads, an active-travel company that offers hiking and biking tours. Backroads recently created a new category for women adventurers that features walking and hiking trips.

Solo men tend to sign up for biking trips, he says: “If we were to do a walking and hiking trip category for men, it would be crickets. It just wouldn’t sell.”

Most married couples still travel together, the Phocuswright survey found. But one partner having a more flexible schedule has contributed to this change, travel advisers say.

What it means to travel solo depends on whom you ask. Some travelers zoom off on cross-country motorcycle trips or backpacking long distances alone. Others join organized tour groups that cater to specific interests.

Liz Mercer travels often in her work as general manager for a Napa Valley winery and isn’t afraid to sit at a restaurant bar, talk to strangers and ask for local recommendations. She figured that if she could travel solo during work trips, she could extend that philosophy to personal trips. This spring, Mercer plans to spend several solo days in Istanbul and Zurich by bookending a work trip.

She also found inspiration from her 19-year-old daughter, who is traveling solo on a gap year between high school and college. Because Istanbul is a bucket-list destination for Mercer and the trip didn’t work with her husband’s schedule, Mercer decided to go solo.



In 2022, at least 60% of solo travelers on Road Scholar trips, like this one to Utah, were married.

PHOTO: ALYSSA BICHUNSKY/ROAD SCHOLAR

“When else am I going to have this opportunity to do it?” she says. “I’m 47. Let’s travel. Let’s go.”

Consider the finances

Travel companies are expanding offerings for solo travelers. Cruise lines are adding more single-passenger staterooms and tour groups now have more single traveler options.

Solo travelers say they sometimes pay more to have single rooms, but often save overall compared with the cost of two flights and meals. Having one partner stay home to care for pets also helps save on overall costs.

Older couples entertaining the idea of traveling alone should take a broader look at their retirement goals, says Anthony Chambers, chief academic officer at The Family Institute at Northwestern University. This gives partners a chance to consider their fixed income, but also to intentionally listen to

each other’s dreams.

If one partner hesitates about the other’s solo travel, Chambers suggests examining that. “If there are some underlying trust issues that a couple has never really sort of addressed fully, all of a sudden one person going to a destination without the other without their partner is going to feel very threatening,” he says.

Laura Blaquiere plans to spend 14 solo weeks in Europe this year visiting 10 different countries. The 40-year-old human resources adviser from Halifax, Nova Scotia, didn’t travel much in her 20s because she and her husband married young and had three children. She used her vacation time to take care of the kids.

After spending the past three years caring for her mother with early-onset dementia, Blaquiere says she has a renewed urgency to enjoy life. Her mother recently died and Blaquiere is on sabbatical from work. With the support of her husband and daughters, ages 13, 11 and 8, she plans to leave in mid-April.



Laura Blaquiere outside Banff, Alberta, in October. PHOTO: LAURA BLAQUIERE

“It’s going to be my ‘Eat, Pray, Love’ type of trip,” she says. “Although, obviously by love, I don’t mean like finding someone. I’ve been saying self-love.”

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Appeared in the January 22, 2024, print edition as ‘More Travelers Are Flying Solo’.